



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

July 18, 2005

News Release

ICE RETURNS \$2,750 TO 82-YEAR-OLD TELEMARKETING VICTIM *Project COLT law enforcement officers disrupt con artists from Canada*

CHICAGO — Special agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) returned \$2,750 to an elderly Chicago man Friday who has lost approximately \$60,000 of his savings to telemarketing con artists operating from Canada.

The victim's money was recovered by Project COLT, a multi-agency joint initiative targeting telemarketing fraud including: ICE, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the FBI, and the U.S. Postal Service Inspection Service.

The 82-year-old victim was first contacted early this year by telemarketers claiming to be attorneys and/or government officials who told him he won the Canadian lottery. The victim was instructed to send money to cover the insurance and taxes on the lottery winnings before the money could be released. Since February the victim has sent approximately \$60,000 via Western Union, Money Gram or standard mail to the telemarketing con artists. The victim recently disconnected his phone and moved in with a family member because of the sheer volume of telemarketing calls he was receiving.

Elissa A. Brown, special agent-in-charge for the Chicago ICE office, warns Illinois residents to be vigilant about such scams, which have already bilked people – especially senior citizens – in the United States out of tens of millions of dollars.

“There's no such thing as free money,” said Brown. “This victim only received a small portion back of the thousands of dollars he sent to these criminals. These sophisticated con artists appear trustworthy to their elderly victims who aren't used to such deceitful tactics.”

Last November ICE agents returned \$3,800 to an elderly Chicago man who had sent \$7,600 to telemarketing con artists. In another Illinois case, ICE agents recovered \$12,200 and returned it to an elderly Barrington man bilked out of more than \$250,000 over a two-year period in a similar version of the long-running telemarketing scam.

Telemarketing fraud, which primarily targets elderly victims in the United States, has resulted in the loss of tens of millions of dollars by people who are least able to recover from financial loss. Victims often lose their entire life savings. Fraudulent telemarketers represent themselves to victims as lawyers, government officials, police officers, accountants or lottery company officials. The victims are told that they will receive a sum of money varying from thousands to millions of dollars in lottery winnings.

The focus of Project COLT is to identify, disrupt and dismantle telemarketing fraud operations. Project COLT consists of law enforcement officers who intercept funds (usually bank drafts and cashiers' checks), so they can be recovered and ultimately returned to victims. These officers also work to prevent further victimization both through public education, and by prosecuting those who commit fraud.

Project COLT members also have formed partnerships with Canada Customs and Revenue, Canada Post Corporation, Federal Express, Purolator, United Parcel Service, DHL and other companies to assist with fund interception and return.

To report suspicious telemarketing activity, members of the public can contact Project COLT's hotline at 888-495-8501.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.